Data driven inquiry practices: Teachers’ perspectives
Ravinder Koul, Ph.D.
Penn State University--Great Valley
Room 212E, SSB
30 East Swedesford Road
Malvern, PA 19355
USA
Email:
RXK141@PSU.EDU

The paper will summarize my findings on teachers’ conceptions of the nature, role and purpose of assessment, and factors that influence the integration of different dimensions of assessment. The research participants are in-service teachers enrolled in the “Teacher as Inquirer” course in a graduate level teacher-leadership program at an institution of higher education. The content of the course focused on the following four dimensions of assessment: 1) policy dimension (how state and federal policies affect testing and assessment by encouraging and requiring it, and by regulating the use of educational tests and information based on them); 2) measurement dimension (the reliability and validity of content, measures of assessment, and grading policies and their social consequences); 3) curricular and instructional dimension (alignment of assessment with content, state and national standards, benchmarks, and performance assessment tasks); and 4) equity dimension (appropriate accommodation for the effect of a disability or of limited English proficiency on subject matter). Teachers actively engaged in inquiry on what would constitute “strong” assessment practices, that is, practices that integrate the four assessment dimensions. In both face-to-face and on-line discussions, teachers were asked to consider the following questions: To what extent their school wide assessment practices reflect each of the four dimensions of assessment? To what extent their school’s assessment practices have changed in relation to the teaching of standards? How can teachers use assessment data to make well-informed, school-specific instructional decisions? What are the impediments?

Each participant identified an assessment problem of school wide importance and implemented a solution at the building/school/district level. Using a Reflective Action Planning Model (see Frost et. al., 2000), teachers outlined a detailed plan of action integrating each of the four dimensions of assessment. The action plan included each of the following steps (Frost et. al., 2000): Collaboration and consultation with peers and administrators in school, systematic inquiry into assessment issues (data gathering, analyzing, evaluating, and discussing), professional learning (mastering new skills, staff training, and developing personal understanding of assessment), and documenting the process (electronic portfolio, collecting evidence). Course participants prepared a portfolio documenting their work, which included critical narrative to describe their experiences with data driven inquiry practices. ANGEL, a web-based course management system, enabled course participants to be involved in numerous threaded on-line discussions. ANGEL’s collaborative tools facilitated argumentation, persuasion and consensus building around the purpose and function of assessment. Using constant comparison method, data was analyzed to assess teachers’ conceptualizations of “strong” and “weak” assessment practices and influence factors.